

Teacher Preparation for Early Childhood Special Education in Taiwan

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is intended to present the current model of teacher preparation for early childhood special education in Taiwan. Documentary analysis was conducted in the study to collect and analyze the obtained data. The main features of teacher preparation policies for early childhood special education in Taiwan could be summarized as: (1) The Ministry of Education is the competent authority for teacher preparation; (2) The teacher preparation programs must be approved by the Ministry of Education; (3) The teacher education courses are regulated by the Ministry of Education; (4) Teacher preparation consists of pre-service teacher education and teacher qualification test. In addition, teacher preparation procedures in Taiwan and comparisons in teacher preparation practices between Taiwan and other nations were also discussed in the paper.

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Introduction

The importance of special education has gradually been recognized in Taiwan since 1960s (Department of Social Education, Ministry of Education, 1981). The past half a century has witnessed a rapid growth in public demand for special education programs that serve children with special needs. The development of special education also results in the teacher supply in need. Of those teacher supply needs, the preparation of elementary and high school special education teachers seems to become a priority due to the early development emphasis of special education on these two education stages. However, the enactment of the Special Education Act in 1984 was a breaking point for the development of early childhood special education in Taiwan. According to this law, preschool children with special needs could be educated in home, kindergarten, special kindergarten (class), or kindergarten in special school (Ministry of Education, 1984). It is essential that teachers working with special needs young children have preparation that reflects not only practical experiences but also an educational foundation based on current research and the latest strategies in early childhood special education. A fundamental element in the provision of the quality services for young children with special needs and their

families is the preparation of qualified special education teachers to deliver those services (Miller and Staton, 2000). For the purpose of enforcing this law, some teacher preparation measures for early childhood special education have been developed.

In 1980s, a certified early childhood special education teacher must be equipped with two qualifications of certified early childhood education teacher and acquisition of 20 credit coursework in special education (Ministry of Education, 1987). Essentially, this was a course-based model of licensure in special education. The “add-on” endorsement approach for certifying early childhood special education teachers did not only appear in Taiwan but also existed in the United States (McCollum, 1986; Jambor, Gargiulo, Guddemi, Brown, Campbell, & Davis, 1990). For carrying out the Teacher Preparation Act enacted in 1994, Ministry of Education started to allow other universities besides normal universities (teacher preparation universities) and teachers colleges to prepare various teachers in early childhood, elementary and high schools (Ministry of Education, 2002). Before this policy, only normal university and teachers colleges could provide teacher preparation courses to those who are interested in becoming an early childhood, elementary, high school, or special education teacher. This new policy seemed to be similar to many other countries’ approach (Ho, 2000; Wang, 2003).

In 2005, the Amendments to the Teacher Preparation Act require all students who complete pre-service teacher education courses to take a teacher qualification test in order to be certified (Ministry of Education, 2005). Therefore, the procedure starting from the set up of teacher education program, then recruitment of teacher trainees, pre-service training, basic competence test, and finally awarding a certification, Taiwan seems to develop a somewhat sophisticated system for teacher preparation education. There is no any study found in relation to teacher preparation for early childhood special education in Taiwan presently. A systematic introduction to Taiwanese approach to teacher preparation for early childhood special education seems valuable for comparative education. The purpose of this paper is intended to present the current model of teacher preparation for early childhood special education in Taiwan. Discussion on this model will also be made in this paper.

Methods

Based on the aforementioned research purpose, documentary analysis was conducted in the study to collect and analyze the obtained data. For analysis, all documents of legislations and regulations related to teacher preparation for early childhood special education in Taiwan and references in association with teacher preparation issues were collected.

All documents were subjected to qualitative textual analysis employing the process of constant comparison methods described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Specifically speaking, the analyzing procedure included document reviewing, data categorizing and comparing, data organization and integration, topic presenting, and making generalization and conclusion.

Teacher Preparation Policies

The laws and regulations related to the preparation of early childhood special education teachers in Taiwan have established the foundations and policies for preparing preschool special education teachers. All these laws and regulations are in association, directly or indirectly, with each other. The main features of teacher preparation policies for early childhood special education could be summarized as follows.

The Ministry of Education in the central government is the competent authority for teacher preparation. A teacher preparation review commission established by the Ministry of Education are responsible for the review of teacher preparation plans, teacher training institutions, teacher preparation courses, evaluation and guidance of teacher preparation, and so on (Ministry of Education, 2005).

The Ministry of Education must approve the teacher preparation programs. According to current requirements, all normal universities, teachers colleges, and other universities could prepare teachers for early childhood, elementary, high schools, and special education but their teacher preparation proposals must be reviewed and approved by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2005).

The teacher education courses are regulated by the Ministry of Education. All accredited teacher preparation institutions must propose their teacher education courses to the Ministry of Education for approval before they start their training programs (Ministry of Education, 2003, 2005).

Teacher preparation consists of preservice teacher education and teacher qualification test. For those who have completed preservice teacher education, they must take the teacher qualification test in order to get certified (Ministry of Education, 2005, 2010).

Preparation Procedures

Based on the previously presented teacher preparation policies, the training of early childhood special education teachers seems to start from preservice education program and terminate at getting certified. From the perspectives of teacher training institutions, the flow chart of preparation procedure for early childhood special education teachers could be shown in Figure 1.

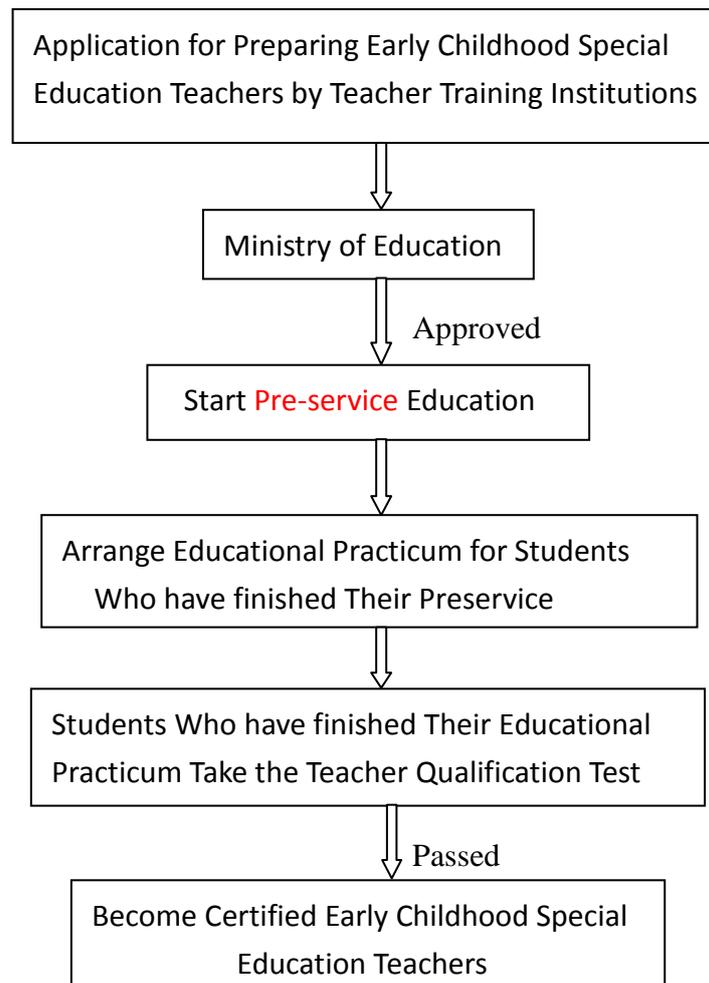


Figure 1. Teacher Preparation Procedure

From the teacher preparation procedure for early childhood special education (Figure 1), the following four critical components seem to be manifested: (1) Application for teacher preparation program; (2) Pre-service teacher education; (3) Arranging educational practicum; and (4) Taking the teacher qualification test. The key content of each component will be described as follows.

Application for teacher preparation program: For the purpose of preparing early childhood special education teachers, any university must propose its application plan and related data to the Ministry of Education for review. The application plan should include the following information (Ministry of Education, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2011):

1. Target students, method of student screening, and criterion for screening in.
2. Background of the institution: Current colleges, departments, number of teachers and students, faculty/student ratios, the measure of building area, etc.

3. Pre-service teacher education curriculum planning: Curriculum planning must include general education profession courses (at least 10 semester credits) and special education profession courses (at least 30 semester credits).
4. Educational practicum plan: The schools used for educational practicum must be determined before application.
5. Faculty appointment: At least 5 full-time teacher educators with Ph.D. or associate professorship must be employed for the program. Those teacher educators must have specialties commensurate with their teaching courses.
6. Professional books and journals, instruments and facilities needed must meet the requirements established by the Ministry of Education.

The review process for the application plan consists of two stages as follows:

1. Professional evaluation: Five scholars or experts appointed by the Ministry of Education will evaluate the application plan. Their evaluations may result in one of the following four rating scores: Strongly recommended (5 points), recommended (3 points), unwillingly recommended (1 point), and not recommended (no point).
2. Only those plans with a mean above 3.2 points could be sent to the teacher preparation review commission for final decision.

Pre-service teacher education: This is the actual stage of instruction for pre-service teacher training. Each university or college would carry out its pre-service teacher education program reviewed and approved by the Ministry of Education. Since all pre-service teacher education programs for early childhood special education follow the same curriculum guidelines set by the Ministry of Education, their required courses are similar and elective courses might reflect specialties of their own. The following curriculum outline is an example of pre-service education for early childhood special education teachers developed by Chung Yuan Christian University (2000).

1. General education profession courses: Take 10 semester credits from the following courses:
 - (1) Language expression of young children (2)
 - (2) Behavior observation of young children (2)
 - (3) Special education for young children (2)
 - (4) Development and educare of young children (2)
 - (5) Parent education for exceptional students (2)
 - (6) Curriculum design for kindergarton (2)
2. Required common courses for special education profession: 8 semester credits.

- (1) Introduction to special education (3)
 - (2) Identification and assessment for exceptional children (3)
 - (3) Instructional design for special education (2)
3. Elective common courses for special education profession: 8-12 semester credits.
- (1) Ethics of special education (2)
 - (2) Management of resource room (2)
 - (3) Administration, laws, and regulations of special education (2)
 - (4) Techniques of behavior modification (2)
 - (5) Sex education for exceptional children (2)
 - (6) Perceptual and motor training (2)
 - (7) Case study (2)
 - (8) Social work (2)
 - (9) Human physiology (2)
 - (10) Technological application in special education (2)
 - (11) Language development and therapy (2)
4. Special education profession courses for various categories: 10-14 semester credits.
- (1) Required courses: 4 semester credits
 - a. Teaching practicum for special education (4)
 - (2) Elective courses: 6-10 semester credits (teaching materials and methods and at least 2 semester credits from other courses in the same category are required). These elective courses are divided into the following six categories:
 - a. Giftedness and talent: Courses related to this category.
 - b. Mental retardation: Courses related to this category.
 - c. Personality or behavior disorder: Courses related to this category.
 - d. Hearing impairment: Courses related to this category.
 - e. Speech and language impairments: Courses related to this category.
 - f. Multiple disabilities: Courses related to this category.

Generally speaking, all students, either undergraduates or graduates, could be screened into the pre-service teacher education program, if they wish (Ministry of Education, 2005). Although the courses they take from the pre-service teacher education program are considered “add-on” to their original study programs, in terms of teacher education, it is a “free-standing” program.

Arranging educational practicum: After completing the prescribed coursework of pre-service teacher education, students could apply for full-time educational practicum for half a year if they meet one of the following requirements (Ministry of

Education, 2011)::

1. They are qualified for graduation from Bachelor program.
2. They are graduate students with a Bachelor's degree and finish all required coursework of their graduate programs.
3. They are college graduates with Bachelor degrees.

All higher education institutions responsible for teacher preparation must establish practicum and career guidance departments for educational practicum and career counseling services (Ministry of Education, 2005). The so-called educational practicum includes teaching practicum, homeroom teacher practicum, administration practicum, and study activities. The teacher preparation universities must develop regulations to implement educational practicum in regard to the following content (Ministry of Education, 2011):

1. The selection principles for practicum supervisors of the teacher preparation institution, educational practicum institutions and their mentor teachers for practicum .
2. The practicum guidance approaches, practicum student number per practicum supervisor, practicum student number per mentor teacher, content of practicum plan, content of educational practicum, items and methods of practicum assessment, and practicum date and time.
3. Amount of teaching time per week, rights, obligations, and contracting in student practicum.
4. The methods to manage the situation that students fail their educational practicum evaluation.
5. Other content related to educational practicum.

In addition, the teacher preparation universities should select appropriate schools and sign contracts with those institutions to provide full-time educational practicum. The educational practicum (must include teaching demonstration) assessments are jointly made, 50% each, by teacher preparation universities and educational practicum institutions (Ministry of Education, 2011).

Taking the teacher qualification test: Those students who finish the pre-service teacher education (educational practicum included) will be awarded a certificate of completing teacher pre-service education by their teacher preparation universities. Students with a certificate of completing pre-service teacher education could take the teacher qualification test. If they pass the test, a teacher certificate will be awarded by the Ministry of Education. To administer the teacher qualification test, the Ministry of Education is responsible to establish the teacher qualification test committee, or commission relevant schools or agencies to carry out this task, if necessary (Ministry of Education, 2005).

The responsibilities of the teacher qualification test committee are to review the test methods, test affairs, test results, and other related matters (Ministry of Education, 2005a). The teacher qualification test is a written examination and is held once a year. Those people with a certificate of completing pre-service teacher education in early childhood special education could take this teacher qualification test (Ministry of Education, 2010a). The test subjects for early childhood special education teachers consist of the following four areas (Ministry of Education, 2010b):

1. Chinese language: composition, reading, phonetics, etc.
2. Educational principles and system: Educational psychology, educational sociology, educational philosophy, educational system, laws, regulations, and policies.
3. Assessment and guidance of special education students: Assessment strategies, assessment instruments, interpretation of assessment results and application, identification and placement of special education students, physical and mental characteristics of various exceptional students, guidance, related professional services, and family support.
4. Curriculum and instruction of special education: Students should take one of the following categories which is relevant to the nature of their teacher preparation education:
 - (1) Physical and mental disabilities category: Curriculum development and design of special education (individualized education program included), instructional principles and design (teaching materials and methods included), instructional environment planning (assistive technology included), and instructional assessment.
 - (2) Giftedness and talent category: Education and instructional models, curriculum development and design of special education (instructional environment planning included), instructional principles and design (individualized guidance plan included), instructional assessment, curriculum and instruction for exceptional groups of gifted and talented students.

In terms of the test results, a perfect score for each of the four subjects is 100. A student who intends to pass the teacher qualification test has to meet the following requirements (Ministry of Education, 2010a):

1. The average score of four subjects must be 60 or above.
2. None of any two subjects all have a score below 50.
3. None of any subject has a score of 0.

All test results have to be reviewed and confirmed by the teacher qualification test committee. The Ministry of Education is in charge of issuing the teacher

certificates to those who passed the test.

Discussion

From the teacher preparation policies and preparation procedure, the teacher preparation for early childhood special education in Taiwan seems to reveal several features. First of all, Taiwanese system for preparing early childhood special education teachers is apparently quite centralized since the central government nearly control all the teacher preparation process starting from identifying which universities could prepare various kinds of teachers to deciding if a teacher could be certified.

Currently, the Ministry of Education has a somewhat sophisticated system of certification, program standards and accreditation, which is in place. This process is quite different from the United States which remains to a large extent far more decentralized than in many other nations. In the United States, it is largely the responsibility of the 50 individual states to regulate and control entry, training, testing and licensing requirements for teachers (Ingersoll, 2007). In Japan, its Ministry of Education controls the education system centrally by deciding the curriculum and educational standards as well (Fujita & Dawson, 2007). Taiwanese system seems to have a similar counterpart in Japan. Furthermore, the input from professional organizations to influence the teacher preparation practices is quite apparent in the United States (McCollum, 1986; Council for Exceptional Children, 1995; Sandall, McLean & Smith, 2000; Geiger, 2002). In comparison with the United States, the professional organizations in Taiwan seem to be less influential to the policy making of teacher preparation.

Secondly, in terms of pre-service teacher education, the Ministry of Education (2003) has some regulations in regard to subjects and credits of educational profession for pre-service education of special education teachers to regulate the curriculum arrangements for teacher preparation universities. In comparison with Japan and the United States (Wang, 2003), the flexibility of curriculum development for teacher preparation institutions in Taiwan seems insufficient. On the other hands, students seeking admission to the accredited teacher preparation programs must be already in the undergraduate or graduate programs. This requirement is pretty similar to Japan and the United States (Jambor, Gargiulo, Guddemi, Brown, Campbell, & Davis, 1990; Wang, 2003; Fujita & Dawson, 2007).

Thirdly, as to educational practicum, the teacher preparation universities in Taiwan are not only responsible for arranging pre-service curriculum and instruction but also managing educational practicum for teacher trainees. It is quite similar to the practices of the United States and Japan. Both two countries usually require completion of a program of practice or student teaching to get certified by pre-service

teacher preparation universities or colleges (Ingersoll, 2007; Fujita & Dawson, 2007). However, in Germany, the institutions responsible for student teaching are not the original universities which students get their teacher preparation programs. Using an independent institution to be in charge of student teaching might have the potential to provide a more comprehensive and thoughtful practice for practicum. German practice seems to have some implications for Taiwan (Wang, 2003).

Finally, a written teacher qualification test is now applied to all who intend to be certified in Taiwan. In the United States, certification also usually entails passage of written examinations in both pedagogy and content knowledge (Jambor, Gargiulo, Guddemi, Brown, Campbell, & Davis, 1990 ; Geiger, 2002; Ingersoll, 2007). Compared to the United States, content knowledge is not included in Taiwanese teacher qualification test. However, there is no such teacher qualification examination in Japan but an employed teacher is required to take a wide range of inservice training programs provided by the Ministry of Education, local boards of education and numerous voluntary study associations of teachers (Fujita & Dawson, 2007). To take a teacher examination before certified could also be found in Germany which requires all teacher trainees to take two national teacher qualification tests and strict practicum in order to be certified (Wang, 2003). It is necessary to mention that there is no teacher certification level existing in Taiwan. In other words, early childhood special education teachers could only be differentiated between certified and uncertified. In comparison to some other countries like Japan and the United States (Jambor, Gargiulo, Guddemi, Brown, Campbell, & Davis, 1990; Utah State Office of Education, 1993), the teacher certification level system seems to exist. To take Japan as an example, there are three levels of teacher's certificates based on different teacher's qualifications: Advanced certificate, first class certificate and second class certificate. In addition, it may be worth mentioning that early childhood special education teachers in Japan are required to have both special school teacher certificate and general certificate for kindergarten teacher (Fujita & Dawson, 2007). Does Taiwan need a teacher certification level system? It could be a hot topic for policy makers, teacher educators, early childhood special education teachers, parents, and the public in the future.

To some extent, pre-service preparation practices in early childhood special education have been influenced more by policy, legislation, and philosophy than by empirical data (Snyder and McWilliam, 1999). The teacher preparation for early childhood special education in Taiwan is no exception. Before the pre-service preparation practices empirically validated, to suspect of "product reliability" is still warranted reasonable. While a sufficient quantity of early childhood special education teachers might be needed, it is the quality of personnel that would be crucial to

program success. Research in special education teacher education is pretty scarce. Only a very few experimental studies have examined the effects of different pedagogical approaches on the learning of pre-service students in special education (Brownell, Ross, Colón & McCallum, 2003). The comparative research that documents the characteristics of effective teacher preparation programs for early childhood special education seems important because policymakers and program practitioners need alternative choices between different ways of preparing quality teachers in order to possibly improve the “product reliability.” Taiwanese model of teacher preparation for early childhood special education compared with some other countries might have its unique characteristics. Nevertheless, the “product reliability” of teacher preparation for early childhood special education in Taiwan seems to be worth a need to further investigate.

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